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AUTHOR	Giangreco, Michael F.
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ABSTRACT

This final report documents the activities and products of the Related Services Research Project to Support the Education of Students with Deaf Blindness, a four-year research project which was designed to define, implement, and evaluate a set of specific strategies that would result in effective special education and related service provision for students with deaf-blindness in general education schools and classrooms. The strategies were developed to ensure that related services are educationally necessary and relevant, as well as coordinated in ways that avoid undesirable gaps, overlaps, and contradictions in services. Using self-study materials and technical assistance, educational teams used the 10 interrelated guidelines developed in a team process called VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach) to make related services decisions, implement their decisions, and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. Findings from the project indicate: (1) students with deaf-blindness have complex and highly individualized educational needs; (2) professionals working with students with deaf-blindness had high turnover rates; (3) given appropriate supports, students with deaf-blindness can be successfully educated in general education classrooms; (4) VISTA was successfully used to reduce service gaps, reduce conflict among team members, involve families and general class teachers more efficiently, and increase the satisfaction of team members with their decision-making. (CR)

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ED 433 661

Final Report

Related Services Research Project to Support the Education of Students with Deaf-Blindness

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Prepared by:
Michael F. Giangreco, Ph.D., Project Director
University of Vermont
Center on Disability and Community Inclusion
The University Affiliated Program of Vermont
499C Waterman Building
Burlington, Vermont 05405-0160

802-656-1144 (voice)
802-656-4031 (TTD)
802-656-1357 (fax)
mgiangre@zoo.uvm.edu (email)

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Abstract

This Final Report documents the activities and products of the Related Services Research Project to Support the Education of Students with Deafblindness, a four-year research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. This report provides an introduction to the project followed by: (a) the project's objectives; (b) a conceptual framework and description of VISTA; (c) the research questions and studies conducted by project staff; (d) a bibliography of other project products; (e) major findings and continuing concerns; (f) dissemination and impact; (g) ongoing activities; and (h) an assurance of distribution.

I. Introduction

The purpose of the **Related Services Research Project (RSRP)** was to refine, implement, and evaluate a set of specific strategies that result in effective special education and related service provision for students with deaf-blindness in general education schools and classrooms. Given the many service providers involved in educating students with deaf-blindness, the strategies presented in this project were designed to ensure that related services are educationally necessary and relevant, as well as coordinated in ways that avoid undesirable gaps, overlaps, and contradictions in services. The project stressed the importance of issues pertaining to related services decision-making, coordination, implementation, and evaluation as crucial to the successful education of students with deaf-blindness.

RSRP activities are designed to increase the capacity of local educational teams to make sound decisions that account for the overlaps among the disciplines and address their interdependencies. Using self-study materials and technical assistance as needed, teams used the ten interrelated guidelines operationalized in a team process called **VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach)** to make related services decisions, implement those decisions, and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions.

Work conducted on this project was completed primarily by staff from the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the University of Vermont. Throughout the project, cooperative arrangements were established between Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the

University of Vermont and the New England Center for Deaf-Blind Services (1994-1996) and the University of Utah's Department of Special Education (1996-1999). These arrangements brought together complimentary resources and knowledge about the central topics addressed by this proposal such as deaf-blindness, related services, and inclusive education, and also allowed for project activities to reach students in four states and to access students and team members from culturally diverse backgrounds.

This project proposed five major research questions to be answered using various research methodologies including quasi-experimental designs, descriptive designs that are both quantitative and qualitative, as well as a formative evaluation design. The data collected through these studies yielded substantial information designed to have practical implications and direct usefulness to teachers, related service providers, advocates, and researchers interested in improving the quality of education and valued life outcomes for students with deaf-blindness and students with other types of disabilities in settings shared by people without disabilities.

This reports summarizes: (a) the project's objectives; (b) a conceptual framework and description of VISTA; (c) the research questions and studies; (d) a bibliography of other project products; (e) major findings; (f) dissemination and impact; (g) ongoing activities; and (h) assurance of distribution.

II. Project Objectives

The overall objectives for this project included:

a. To reorganize existing related service information and the strategies embedded in the VISTA process into a self-study format suitable for use by school teams serving students with deaf-blindness.

b. To identify and describe the related service decision-making strategies and provision (e.g., type, frequency, mode, location) for students with deaf-blindness in public schools.

c. To have teams of general educators, special educators, related service personnel, and family members teach each other to use the strategies embedded in the VISTA process to assist them in making related service decisions, implementing, and evaluating them.

d. To evaluate the impact of the use of the VISTA process on student learning outcomes and valued life outcomes.

e. To identify the contextual factors that effect the use of the VISTA process as teams make related service decisions and implement their plans.

f. To identify strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA process that will be useful in improving the process/tool.

g. To disseminate a practical document describing the set of strategies embedded in the VISTA process so that it can be easily used by school teams and to disseminate data-based information throughout Vermont, New England, and nationally describing the use and impact of the VISTA process on students with deaf-blindness in general education schools and classrooms.

All the stated project objectives were achieved.

III. Description of VISTA

VISTA is a collaborative team process for determining: (1) what related services are needed to support specific components of a student's educational program, (2) the educational relevance and necessity of related services, (3) functions of services, (4) frequency and mode of services (e.g., consult, direct), and (5) location of service provision. The Supplement to VISTA (Giangreco, 1996) includes updated information, procedures, and forms to augment the VISTA manual in between formal revisions.

Although this project explored the use of VISTA for students with deafblindness, the approach is not designed exclusively for that population. Rather, it is a generic planning process that can be used by teams who work with students who have various types and levels of disability. VISTA is particularly relevant for students with deafblindness because these students

tend to encounter a large number of team members representing a variety of disciplines. In such situations decision-making and provision of services can become more complicated and the need to ensure coordination becomes paramount.

VISTA is based on ten guidelines that form its conceptual framework. This framework is designed to facilitate effective teamwork and related service decision-making to support the education of students with disabilities in general education settings. These 10 guidelines are:

1. Establish and maintain a collaborative team.
2. Define the components of the educational program.
3. Understand the interaction between program, placement and services.
4. Use a value system for decision-making: "Only as specialized as necessary".
5. Determine functions of service providers and their interrelatedness.
6. Apply essential criteria: "Educational relevance and necessity".
7. Determine who has authority for decision-making: "Consensus".
8. Match the mode and frequency of service to the functions served.
9. Determine the location and strategies for service provision.
10. Engage in ongoing implementation and evaluation of support services.

VISTA includes five sets of activities in the form of "To Do" Lists:

- General Preparation This includes steps such as: (a) forming a team, (b) learning about team members' skills, (c) getting to know the student (d) clarifying who are core and extended team members; (d) ensuring that all team members understand the principles upon which VISTA is based and are making informed decisions to participate in the process;

and (e) discussing team attitudes to assist in the development of a shared framework.

- Getting Ready for the VISTA Meeting This includes steps such as: (a) determining the components of the student's educational program, (b) sharing educational program components with all team members, (c) determining educational placement; and (d) arranging the time, place and participants for the VISTA meeting.
- Using the VISTA Worksheet at the VISTA Meeting This includes steps such as: (a) considering what supports can be appropriately provided by the classroom staff, (b) identifying the kind of supports a student needs to access or participate in his or her educational program, (c) determining who has the capabilities to provide the supports which includes consideration of natural supports, (d) establishing educational relevance and necessity of services, (e) ensuring that professional supports are only as special as necessary, and (f) reaching agreement about the types of services that need to be offered.
- Using the VISTA Team Summary at the VISTA Meeting This includes steps such as: (a) reaching consensus about services to be provided, (b) determining service frequency and mode of service provision, (c) agreeing on the least restrictive location for service provision, and (d) determining a date to evaluate the impact of service provision.
- Next Steps After the VISTA Meeting This includes steps such as: (a) making arrangements to share the VISTA results with all appropriate individuals, (b) using the VISTA forms to identify subgroups of within the team that need to work together on specific tasks,

(c) implementing decisions made using VISTA, and (d) evaluating the impact of support services.

VISTA is unique because of its: (a) focus on establishing a foundation of shared goals rather the separate goals for each discipline; (b) emphasis on educational relevance and necessity of related services (consistent with the IDEA definition of related services); (c) approaches to involving all team members, especially parents and general education teachers who too frequently are left out of making related service decisions; (d) philosophical foundation of seeking to provide related services that are "only as specialized as necessary" in conjunction with considering the use of natural supports; and (e) emphasis on considering the interrelationships among a variety of disciplines to avoid gaps, overlaps, and contradictions in services due to role overlap across various disciplines. This combination of characteristics distinguishes VISTA from commonly used approaches where related services providers make decisions in autonomous or relatively isolated ways that insufficiently consider the educational relevance and necessity of proposed services.

IV. Research Questions and Studies

VISTA is one of the only existing school-based related services decision-making models that: (a) is based on foundational research, (b) has been field-tested and revised based on systematic data collection over a period of years, and (c) has data supporting its efficacy and impact

Quantitative and qualitative studies (listed later in this section) have established that, when used with a reasonable level of fidelity, VISTA contributes positively to students' educational outcomes and does what it purports to do: (1) provides a team process for related services decision-making; (2) avoids undesirable service gaps and overlaps; (3) avoids unnecessary service contradictions and conflicts among team members; (4) bases related services decision-making on a shared set of educational goals; (5) increases involvement of parents and general education teachers in related services decision-making; (6) increases team member satisfaction with related services decision-making; and (7) significantly increases the extent to which team members agree about who should be doing what, with whom, and why in regard to support services. Changes in VISTA based on these data are reflected in a Supplement to VISTA which also has been formally and favorably reviewed by consumers (See Study 10).

Four of the ten listed studies are contextual in nature and deal with issues (e.g., attitudes of team members, changes in team membership, consumer perspectives) that have an impact related services decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. The remaining six studies specifically address various aspects of VISTA (i.e., pre-publication version, published version, or Supplement to VISTA). Citations for the VISTA manual and Supplement to VISTA are listed here:

Giangreco, M.F. (1996). Vermont interdependent services team approach: A guide to coordinating educational support services. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Giangreco, (1996). Supplement to VISTA. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Center on Disability and Community Inclusion.

Research Questions:

1. What impact does the use of the VISTA process have on service provision to students (e.g., type, frequency, mode, location)?

2. Does the VISTA process do what it purports to do (e.g., ensure educational necessity and relevance; avoiding gaps, overlaps, contradictions)?

3. What impact does the use of the VISTA process have on student learning outcomes and valued life outcomes?

4. What are the contextual and other factors that impact the usefulness of the VISTA process?

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA process that would assist in improving the process?

Research Studies:

The aforementioned research questions have been addressed through a series of ten research studies that are listed below in chronological order. Ten different individuals, from Vermont, Massachusetts, Arizona, and Utah participated in conducting, analyzing, and authoring these studies.

Study 1 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Luiselli, T.E., & MacFarland, S.Z. (1996). Review of VISTA by representatives of national organizations. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, University Affiliated Program of Vermont. (ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED396490).

A pre-publication version of VISTA underwent review by representatives of 12 national professional, family, and consumer organizations. These organizations included: (a) American Association of the Deaf-Blind, (b) American Foundation for the Blind, (c) American Occupational Therapy Association, (d) American Physical Therapy Association, (e) American Speech/Language/Hearing Association (n = 2), (f) Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (g) Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, (h) Deaf-Blind Coalition, Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults, (i) National Families Association for Deaf-Blind, (j) The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (Related Services Subcommittee), and (k) TRACES (now D-B LINK).

Most of the national reviewers rated the overall quality of draft version of VISTA as "good" or excellent". Respondents indicated that the content of

VISTA was relevant for both students with deaf-blindness as well as those with other disabilities who have educational support service needs. Despite verifying VISTA's content as logical, consistent with exemplary practice, consistent with the practices of their organizations, and not particularly controversial, they indicated that the ideas presented in VISTA were not currently in wide use among people affiliated with their organizations. Reviewers indicated that the content of VISTA included important areas for training and technical assistance for people affiliated with their respective organizations.

Study 2 Citation and Summary:

Giangreco, M.F. (1996a). "The stairs didn't go anywhere!" A self-advocates reflections on specialized services and their impact on people with disabilities. Physical Disabilities: Education and Related Services, 14(2), 1-12.

This article is among the two (of ten) studies conducted on this project that does not specifically address study participants who were deafblind. In this case, the article represents a first-person, consumer perspective on support services by international speaker/consultant and self-advocate, Norman Kunc (of British Columbia, Canada). In this interview, Mr. Kunc describes his experiences receiving educationally related support services and their impact on his life. He offers compelling insights through his personal stories that have direct implications for how professional engage in their work and interact with people with disabilities.

Study 3 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S.W., Luiselli, T.E., & MacFarland, S.Z. (1996). Support service decision-making for students with multiple service needs: Evaluation data. The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 21, 135-144.

This quasi-experimental (pretest/posttest) study explored the use of VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach) with 11 educational teams serving students with multiple disabilities. Information about VISTA, a process to facilitate consensus decision-making about support services (i.e., type, mode, frequency), was obtained by 75 team members through self-study. Following self-study the teams used VISTA to make support service decisions for students with multiple service needs. The findings of this study provide data regarding: (a) changes in team and individual decision-making as a result of using VISTA, (b) the extent to which team members perceived that VISTA did what it purported to do (e.g., increase parental and general education involvement, decrease gaps, overlaps, and contradictions), and (c) changes in the teams' level agreement about which support services students need. Implications for future related service decision-making are discussed.

Study 4 Citation and Summary:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., MacFarland, S.Z., & Luiselli, T. E. (1997). Attitudes about educational and related services provision for students with deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities. Exceptional Children, 63(3), 329-342.

Determining and providing educational support services have long been considered crucial components of an appropriate education for many

students with disabilities. This continues to be true as increasing numbers of students with severe or multiple disabilities are learning in general education classrooms and other integrated settings. Over the past two decades exemplary practices regarding support services have been shifting away from specialist-reliant models and toward those that rely more on natural supports. This study explored attitudes regarding educational and related services provision practices from the perspective of professionals and parents (n = 119) who were educational team members for students with deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities in general education settings. The findings highlight sample respondents' agreements and disagreements with exemplary practices as well as differences across subgroups and within teams. Analyses suggest some internal inconsistencies regarding important service provision practices as well as continuing gaps between attitudes and proposed exemplary practices.

Study 5 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Luiselli, T.E., & MacFarland, S.Z. (1997). Helping or hovering? Effects of instructional assistant proximity on students with disabilities. Exceptional Children, 64(1), 7-18.

This study presents data on the effects of the proximity of instructional assistants on students with multiple disabilities who are placed in general education classrooms. Based on extensive observations and interviews, analyses of the data highlighted eight major findings of educational significance, all related to proximity of instructional assistants. Categories of findings and discussion include: (a) interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators; (b) separation from classmates; (c)

dependence on adults; (d) impact on peer interactions; (e) limitations on receiving competent instruction; (f) loss of personal control; (g) loss of gender identity; and (h) interference with instruction of other students. The article concludes with implications for practice related to policy development, training, classroom practices, and research.

Study 6 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S.W., Luiselli, T.E., & MacFarland, S.Z. (1998). Reaching consensus about educationally necessary support services: A qualitative evaluation of VISTA. Special Services in the Schools, 13 (1/2), 1-32.

This article describes a qualitative evaluation of VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach), based on extensive observations and interviews. A description of VISTA is provided followed by data pertaining to how teams functioned prior to VISTA use and three primary evaluation questions: (a) Does VISTA do what it purports to do? (b) What impact does VISTA have on team members' practices and interactions? and (c) What are the limitations of VISTA and potential improvements from a consumer-based perspective? The data and discussion offer the reader insights into VISTA use and offer suggestions for future research.

Study 7 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S.W., & Nelson, C. (1998). Impact of planning for support services on students who are deaf-blind. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 92(1), 18-29.

This study describes quantitative and qualitative data regarding the use of VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Team Approach) by seven individual student planning teams and its impact on the students with deaf-blindness they educated in general education classes with individually determined supports services. The article describes what VISTA is, existing research on VISTA, and how the current investigation extends that research. The findings describe: (a) student progress, (b) VISTA use, (c) VISTA impact, and (d) the interrelationships among progress, use, and impact from the perspective of the students' parents, general educators, and special educators. Implications for team functioning and service provision are discussed.

Study 8 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Whiteford, T., Whiteford, L., & Doyle, M.B. (1998). Planning for Andrew: A case study of COACH and VISTA use in an inclusive early childhood program. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 45 (4), 375-395.

This is one of two (of ten) studies conducted by this project that does not include a student with deafblindness as a study participant. This case study chronicles the use of two educational planning tools, COACH (Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children: A Guide to Educational Planning for Students with Disabilities) and VISTA (Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach: A Guide to Coordinating Educational Support Services) for Andrew, a four year old child with Down Syndrome who attends a general education preschool. The article documents the decisions his team made using COACH and VISTA and describes the findings of follow-up interviews with his parents, preschool

teacher, special educator, and speech/language pathologist. The findings offer insights into the benefits and limitations of these approaches at the preschool level and discuss implications for facilitating communication and decision-making among team members.

Study 9 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Nelson, C., Young, M.R., & Kiefer-O'Donnell, R. (1999). Changes in educational team membership for students who are deafblind. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 93(3),166-173.

This study examines the changes in team membership for 18 students with deaf-blindness over four school years from 1994-95 to 1997-98. The findings highlight the large number of people involved in each student's education and the high level of turnover among professional staff from year to year. Implications for managing changes in team membership are discussed and recommendations for future research are offered.

Study 10 Citation and Abstract:

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Nelson, C., Young, M.R., & Kiefer-O'Donnell, R. (in press). Improving support service decision-making: Consumer feedback regarding updates to VISTA. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education.

This study provides data from 73 educational team members who used an updated version of the Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach (VISTA) to assist them in planning educationally necessary support services for 11 students with multiple disabilities in general education classes. These data provide evaluative consumer feedback about changes in VISTA

based on limitations identified through previous research. The results indicated that the changes were perceived positively by consumers, particularly related to overall quality, practicality, and more substantive involvement of parents and general education teachers in support service decision-making. Study respondents also identified areas in need of continued improvement in VISTA. Implications for future research, development, and practice are discussed.

V. Other Project Products

(not previously listed as research studies)

Throughout the project period, the following additional published materials were produced, in part, through funds provided by the grant. Sixteen different individuals participated as authors on the listed manuscripts. All of these materials address the objectives of the project in some way, primarily by addressing contextual or related issues such as: inclusive education, collaborative teamwork, curriculum, and instruction; some directly address related services issues. They are presented in chronological order, with the most recent publications listed first.

Giangreco, M.F. (in press). Related services research for students with low incidence disabilities: Implications for speech-language pathologists in inclusive classrooms. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools.

Dennis, R., Edelman, S., Giangreco, M.F., Rubin, R., & Thoms, P. (in press). Related services for Vermont's students with disabilities. Montpelier: Vermont Department of Education.

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S. , Dennis, R., Rubin, R., & Thoms, P. (in press). Vermont's guidelines for related services: Supporting the education of students with disabilities. Physical Disabilities: Education and Related Services.

Giangreco, M.F. (in press). Moving toward inclusive education. In W.L. Heward, Exceptional children: An introduction to special education (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill, an imprint of Prentice Hall.

Giangreco, M.F., & Doyle, M.B. (in press). Curricular and instructional considerations for teaching students with disabilities in general education classrooms. In S. Wade (Ed.), Inclusive education: A casebook of readings for prospective and practicing teachers (Volume 1). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Giangreco, M.F., Prelock, P., Reid, R., Dennis, R., & Edelman, S. (in press). Roles of related services personnel in inclusive schools. In R. Villa & J. Thousand, (Eds.), Restructuring for caring and effective education: Piecing the puzzle together (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Giangreco, M.F. (Ed.) (1998). Quick-Guides to inclusion 2: Ideas for educating students with disabilities. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Giangreco, M.F., Cloninger, C.J., & Iverson, V.S. (1998). Choosing outcomes and accommodations for children (COACH): A guide to educational planning for students with disabilities (2nd edition). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Giangreco, M.F. (1997). Key lessons learned about inclusive education: Summary of the 1996 Schonell Memorial Lecture. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 44 (3), 193-206.

Giangreco, M.F. (Ed.) (1997). Quick-Guides to inclusion: Ideas for educating students with disabilities. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Giangreco, M.F. (1997). Responses to Nietupski et al [A review of curricular research in severe disabilities from 1976-1995 in six selected journals] Journal of Special Education. 31 (1), 56-57.

Giangreco, M.F. (1997). Persistent questions about curriculum for students with severe disabilities. Physical Disabilities: Education and Related Services , 15 (2), 53-56.

Giangreco, M.F. (1996). Extending the "comfort zone" to include every child. Journal of Early Intervention, 20 (3), 206-208.

Rainforth, B., & Giangreco, M.F. (1996). Limitations to degree of involvement: A reply to Parette, Hourcade, and Brimer. Physical Disabilities: Education and Related Services, 15 (1), 1-6.

Hull, K., Capone, A., Giangreco, M.F., & Ross-Allen, J. (1996). Through their eyes: Creating functional, child sensitive, individualized education plans. In R. McWilliam (Ed.), Rethinking pull-out services in early intervention: A professional resource (pp. 103-119). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Giangreco, M.F. (1996). Choosing options and accommodations for children (COACH): Curriculum planning for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. In W. Stainback & S. Stainback (Eds.), Inclusion: A guide for educators (pp. 237-254). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Giangreco, M.F. (1996). "What do I do now?!" A teacher's guide to including students with disabilities. Educational Leadership, 53 (5), 56-59.

Giangreco, M.F., & Edelman, S. (December, 1996). How to make decisions about related services provision in schools. American Occupational Therapy Association School System Special Interest Section Newsletter, 3 (4), 7-8).

Baumgart, D., & Giangreco, M. (1996). Key lessons learned about inclusion. In D. Lehr & F. Brown (Eds.), People with disabilities who challenge the system (pp. 79-97). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Giangreco, M.F. & Snell, M.E. (1996). Severe and multiple disabilities. In R. Turnbull & A. Turnbull (Eds.), Improving the implementation of the individuals with disabilities education act: Making schools work for all of America's children (pp. 97-132). Washington, DC: National Council on Disability.

Edelman, S., & Giangreco, M.F. (November, 1995). VISTA: A process for planning educationally necessary support services. Language Learning and Education (Special Interest Division Newsletter of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association), 2(2), 17-18.

Giangreco, M.F. (1995). Related services decision-making: A foundational component of effective education for students with disabilities. Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics 15 (2), 47-67.

VI. Major Findings and Continuing Concerns

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the major findings from this project and areas of continuing concern. Since the project's set of research studies offer explicit procedural detail, analysis of findings, discussion, and implications for practice, the statements offered here are

meant to be generalized statements to assist the reader in determining whether there is information of interest in the project's overall findings.

Major Findings:

1. Students with deafblindness present complex and highly individualized educational needs.
2. The numbers of professionals working with students with deafblindness often approaches or exceeds double figures and turnover is extensive from year to year. Often this results in problems of continuity and teamwork.
3. Students with deafblindness (including those with a full range and combination of sensory, physical, and cognitive characteristics) can be successfully educated services in general education classrooms given appropriate supports. These students can experience positive benefits academically, functionally, and socially.
4. The groups of people assigned to work together to educate students with disabilities in general education classes often do not function as a "team" (even though they may be referred to as one).
5. Difficulty functioning as a team is often characterized by the lack of a shared framework (i.e., shared beliefs and attitudes), lack of shared goals, lack of consumer, parental and general class teacher involvement in decision-making, and isolated decision-making by specialists. This leads to disjointed and fragmented educational and support services.

6. Groups attempting to function as teams typically have no decision-making guidelines or processes to assist them in making educationally relevant and necessary support service decisions. This leads to service gaps, overlaps, and contradictions as well as unnecessary conflicts among members and low levels of satisfaction with their group work.

7. Data indicates that when VISTA is used with a reasonable level of fidelity it does what it purports to do:

   a) provided an identifiable group decision-making process;

   b) reduced service gaps, overlaps, and contradictions;

   c) assisted in clarifying "Who is doing what to whom and why";

   d) helped focus the scope of activities engaged in by support staff;

   e) ensured that related services were educationally necessary;

   f) reduced conflicts among team members;

   g) involved families and general class teachers more effectively; and

   h) increased satisfaction of team members with their decision-making.

8. Data also indicated that team members make substantially different decisions about related services using VISTA than they did when making decisions in isolation.

9. Impact of VISTA on students varied depending upon two primary factors:

   a) the extent to which the team followed through on the decisions they made using VISTA; and

   b) the extent to which the general education teacher was a major player in educating the student with disabilities.

When these two factors were in evidence, the positive impact on the students was most likely to be greater.

10. The type and extent of impact of VISTA varied among teams and individuals, though some level of positive impact was observed and reported within every team studied. Although it is a challenging research link to establish, the ultimate goal of processes like VISTA is that the impact on team members' attitudes, practices, and interactions translates into improved learning and valued life outcomes for children. Some of those positive student changes may be partially attributable to VISTA, but certainly are a result of team members engaging a wide variety of effective educational practices -- VISTA was just one piece of a larger puzzle. The types of impact VISTA contributed to included: (a) helping students gain access to or retain a general education placements and other integrated environments and activities; (b) improved academic and functional outcomes (e.g., attainment of IEP goals); (c) improved social relationships with students without disabilities.

11. VISTA had an impact on professional practices and interactions among team members. VISTA: (a) prompted reflective practice; (b) improved intrateam communication and interaction; (c) identified team strengths and weaknesses of the group; and (d) assisted team members in becoming better consumers of educationally related services.

12. Use of paraprofessionals to support the education of students with disabilities in general education classes has emerged as a major

national issue. Although designed to be supportive of students with disabilities, data collected during this project indicates that, in some cases, paraprofessional supports can actually have unintended negative effects.

13. Related services providers were perceived as most effective when they either had some highly specific (and needed) skill to offer the general education teacher or were present on an ongoing basis. General class teachers generally did not find it helpful to have many related services providers visiting the classroom intermittently. These infrequent visitors were perceived as having little impact. This suggests that it may be more effective to have a smaller team size where team members develop increased skills and have more frequent and substantive interaction with students.
14. VISTA represents content and practices that are not currently in wide use, yet have been identified by several major national organizations as important areas of training and technical assistance.
15. Use of VISTA presented a series of logistical challenges. Concerns were expressed about the time it takes to learn VISTA, the difficulty getting all the team members together, and the time it takes to do VISTA. Respondents indicated that it many circumstances it was worth the time investment. The alternative often was to have a disjointed, fragmented educational program and services.
16. Other concerns were raised when using VISTA. Some of the biggest challenges were: (a) inadequate preparation of team members; (b) insufficient facilitation skills; and (c) deferential behavior among group

members. VISTA requires solid preparation, a thorough understanding of its underlying principles and guidelines, and a good working knowledge of its mechanics.

17. One of the most common glitches during VISTA use was lack of clarity about who would actually be teaching the student in the general education classroom. This confusion typically occurred when there was a difference of opinion among team members about the extent of involvement of the general education teacher. This issue was addressed in the Supplement to VISTA.

18. Consumers perceived the updates to VISTA (as reflected in the Supplement to VISTA) as an improvement over the published version.

Continuing Concerns:

1. An insufficient number of professionals who are working with students who have deafblindness are prepared and skilled to work with students who have these low incidence disabilities. Professionals working with children who are deafblind must also be prepared for the likelihood of concomitant severe disabilities (e.g., orthopedic, cognitive).

2. Despite dissemination efforts, VISTA continues to be used to a fairly limited extent. This is true despite the fact that VISTA it is one of the few (possibly the only) support service decision-making model of its kind that explores the interrelationships among the various disciplines, explicitly matches the IDEA definition of related services, and has been field-tested. The reasons for this are speculative at this

point. The possibilities include: (a) time factor involved in learning and using VISTA, (b) difficulty using the process, (c) lack of emphasis put on related services, (d) insufficient or ineffective outreach, or (e) schools and families are dealing with more basic issues in school access and educational programming such that the types of issues addressed by VISTA are considered secondary. Continued revision of VISTA after the project period (i.e., a second edition of the manual that reflects the research data collected) may help, along with pursuit of continued outreach and training.

3. The various roles of team members continue to be unclear, especially the roles of the general education teacher, the paraprofessional, and the special educator.

4. Large class size and configurations that include a high proportion of students with special needs (e.g., disabilities, "at risk", English as a second language) continue to present challenges to effective education. The populations served in the schools have changed, so must the service delivery and staffing patterns.

5. Large caseload sizes for special educators and related services personnel continue to compromise effective education for students with and without disabilities. This is an area that warrants closer study.

6. There continues to be limited evaluation of related services in educationally settings. Not only do we not know whether these services are having an impact, insufficient planning means that in many cases it is virtually impossible to determine the intended impact

of the services. Since we do not know what the services are supposed to do we cannot effectively evaluate them.

7. Related services personnel and special educators have insufficient opportunities in their preservice and inservice training to work together using collaborative processes such as VISTA. Such collaborative opportunities are important and reflect the actual work they are required to do in schools.

8. VISTA needs continued revision and refinement to streamline the process as much as possible so that it is easier to use. Even in the best case scenarios it is likely that quality group decision-making will take more time that ineffective autocratic or democratic decision-making. Therefore, we may need to adjust our expectations about time use and judge that time expenditure more by what we get out of it rather than merely how long it takes.

9. Related services continue to be a vital component of educational supports for students with low incidence disabilities such as deafblindness. More emphasis needs to be placed on planning for, implementing, and evaluating related services.

VII. Dissemination and Impact

This section of the Final Report estimates the number of people who were directly effected by the Related Services Research Project activities through: (a) participation in research activities; (b) estimated numbers of materials distributed to people in the field; and (c) estimated numbers of people who have received training by the Related Services Research project staff on project related activities (e.g., workshops, classes, presentations). Additional impact was evidenced by several thousand "hits" accessing the project's website www.uvm.edu/~uapvt/RSRP.html and response to an estimated 400 to 500 requests for information by phone, mail, and email. Informational resources were requested and shared with people in several other countries (e.g., Belgium, Denmark, Honduras, England, Guatemala, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Holland, New Zealand, Poland, Scotland, Spain, South Africa).

This project's research activities directly involved 22 students with deafblindness during some time in the project period and approximately 500 team members who served those students (e.g., parents, teachers, special educators, related services personnel). It is estimated that over 250,000 copies of written information disseminated by this project (e.g., the VISTA manual, Supplement to VISTA, 10 research studies, and 22 other project products, project brochures). Articles were disseminated through several different outlets including widely read professional journals (e.g., Educational Leadership, Exceptional Children, Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness), newsletters distributed by groups such as ASHA (American

Speech Hearing and Language Association) and AOTA (American Occupational Therapy Association), and published books.

The project staff provided training to over 6,000 individuals in 22 states (i.e., CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, KS, LA, MA, MD, MO, MT, NC, NH, NY, PA, SC, UT, VA, VT, WA, WV), as well as American's working for the U.S. Government in Europe through a Department of Defense Schools conference in Willingen, Germany. Therefore, through all its sources of dissemination, this project disseminated research-based information pertaining to the project content to between an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 people. The actual number is likely to be higher because several of the materials are known to be used by non project staff in training activities (based on requests to reprint materials).

VIII. Ongoing Activities

Though the Related Services Research Project has officially ended, ongoing activities continue based on the grant's activities and outputs. Most importantly, the information from the project is being synthesized to develop a second edition of the VISTA manual (hopefully within one year). Secondly, the activities of the project informed the activities of an ad hoc group formed in Vermont called the Related Service Work Group. This group, comprised of several stakeholder groups, was responsible for developing "Vermont's Guidelines for Related Services" and is working with the Vermont Department of Education to disseminate information statewide about related services. The group continues to maintain an on-line voluntary

registry of related services providers in Vermont and discussions are underway to hold regional forums in Vermont to share information about Vermont's Guidelines for Related Services. Third, the project's website <www.uvm.edu/~uapvt/RSRP.html> continues to be maintained and plans have been established to revamp and update the site. Last, project staff continue to offer training pertaining to project content in Vermont and nationally.

IX. Assurances Statement of Distribution

A copy of this Final Report is being sent to the ERIC Clearinghouse at the Council for Exceptional in Reston, VA. Additionally the report is being sent to: (a) DB-LINK (National Clearinghouse - Deafblind), (b) the Regional Resource Centers (e.g., Northeast, Midsouth, South Atlantic, Great Lakes, Mountain Plains, Western, and Federal); (c) members of the project's National Advisory Council (including representative organizations); (d) the Vermont Department of Education.